

Presentation to the Commission to Study the Rationalization of University Research

**by Lloyd Axworthy
1971**

The Institute of Urban Studies





THE UNIVERSITY OF
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**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH**

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

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PRESENTATION TO THE COMMISSION
TO STUDY THE RATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

By

Institute of Urban Studies

University of Winnipeg

Director: Lloyd Axworthy

November 16, 1971

Introduction

1 The Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Winnipeg welcomes this opportunity to address the Commission to Study the Rationalization of University Research. As a research organization concerned with utilizing university knowledge and resources for the development of the urban community, the Institute supports the relevance of your terms of reference.

A. Complex Nature of Urban Problems

2 The Commission needs little reminding of the fact that major social and economic problems face Canada. Foremost of these is the fact that Canada is increasingly an urban nation. The complex nature of urban problems constitutes a unique challenge in the development of solutions on a scale large enough to be effective, while still retaining a sensitivity to the concerns of individuals.

B. Scientific Research and Public Policy

3 The Commission rightly states in its statement of Commission that research undertakings in the universities can be planned to serve the advancement of knowledge and provincial, regional and national development. Implied in this statement is an understanding that a major research effort is needed to be subordinate to public policy. Research is increasingly being expected to contribute solutions to many of society's most pressing problems. This idea was strongly supported by the Science Council of Canada in its report entitled, "Towards a National Science Policy for Canada", (Report No. 4., October 1968), where the Council indicated that research should be used as a national instrument for helping to solve Canada's social and economic problems. Such expectations

also imply an awareness of the need for cohesive, multi-faceted research efforts.

C. Organization of Research Activities

It is helpful to look at research activities from the point of view of the use to which research is mainly directed. The Commission has rightly pointed out a renewed public concern for accountability on the part of research organizations who receive large amounts of public funds. It is therefore
4 helpful to briefly consider three types of research organization according to its 'output mix', a theme developed by Eric Trist.

D. Profession-Based Research

In this first research organization, the focus is mainly on research units within governmental organizations which undertake work on immediate
5 practical problems. Many of the federal and provincial (and sometimes local) public bodies fund in-house research activities. Despite the fact that this research is of a "service" nature, these organizations are important as part of the total research output of the country.

A word of caution is perhaps in order at this point. It is realized that the scientific community is already being considerably regulated through the
6 political system, of which in-house research is but one part. It therefore seems unwise to be considering the location of the proposed "Think Tanks" within the federal structure. Rather, let some regional differentiation occur, with these high-powered institutes outside of government in touch with communities and people.

E. Discipline-Based Research

This second category brings us to a consideration of the University as a basis for research activity. In the university, with its various departments according to the particular discipline of learning, research problems are more determined by the needs of theory and method or may represent attempts to explore and establish new fields of inquiry.

Thus the university-based research departments display an "out-put mix" more geared to teaching and research than anything else. It should be stressed once again that too often the demands of teaching act as a major constraint upon the research efforts of faculty.

The research that is published in many cases justifies the criticism by Nevitt Sanford that the discipline orientation of universities has led to increasing fragmentation and specialization. "Effective problem-solving calls for multi-disciplinary work and yet departmentalism seems everywhere on the increase". It may not be stretching the point too far to say that within the academic community the persistence of separatism and academic individualism is a major constraint upon the universities and their research being of greater use in tackling some of our major problems.

For example the Learned Societies which is a major clearing house for new research, because of its discipline-oriented structure, has not acted as a forum for debate of research on public issues, but tends to get lost in academic discussions. Canadian universities and researchers have not yet developed a journal for interdisciplinary discussion of urban problems, such as 'The Public Interest', 'Transaction' and 'Social Policy', in which applied university research receives a widespread dissemination.

11 The privileged position of the universities is being seriously challenged by students and faculty alike, partly as a result of the major social upheavals in the United States that have involved the universities and partly as a result of the heightened sense of responsibility to and involvement in society's problems by increasing numbers of students and faculty. Thus there are greater demands for universities to utilize their knowledge and resources. "Meanwhile, the average citizen looking on from the sidelines insistently asks when the professors are going to stop 'studying' problems and start 'helping' the society by using what they know". (Havelock).

What universities know and the potential for the dissemination and utilization of this knowledge is increasingly the interest of many concerned people both within the university and in government. This concern takes the form of considering the university's potential role to serve society, because of its tremendous knowledge and resources. Such writers see the universities next to government as the chief instrument of social change. However, this analysis of the university's performance in this role unfortunately shows that the problem-solving mission of the university centre is only partially realized and actualized by the university itself.

Our own experience with the university leaves us in no doubt as to the accuracy of this analysis. It has been already pointed out that the organization of the university into discipline-oriented departments results in the dissemination of much university knowledge via each discipline in a form that is often useless for problem-solving policies. At the same time the amount of expertise that filters out to those concerned with formulating solutions to problems is also a result of the inward orientation of the university. This often leads

university academics to a position of distrust or misunderstanding of methods used in problem-solving research projects. Therefore evaluation of applied research projects totally by the academic body has distinct disadvantages.

"Productivity is measured in terms of the number of articles in "prestige" journals, not in terms of the number of people helped or the number of people informed". (Havelock).

The Commission should therefore examine the different styles and approaches to research and seek to remove the impediments to applied research that result because of university structures that oversee research efforts and which have a bias toward more basic research efforts.

F. Research Institutes

A third organizational type of research activity is the increasing number of multi-disciplinary, problem-oriented institutes, many of which are attached to universities. Trist refers to these as 'domain-based' organizations which act as intermediate bodies between user-organizations and orthodox university departments. In his terms of "output mix", they express a research/application mix.

Many people see the research institute as an instrumentality for tackling some of the main issues facing society. The Institute is often considered in the context of mission-oriented research, where the major goal is the development of new approaches and new programmes.

Thus the two major characteristics of mission-oriented research are its multi-disciplinary approach and its orientation towards major societal problems.

Apart from the advantages of university-based research institutes in the areas of collaboration experiences among researchers and the access to a range of

manpower sources and the development of new educational thrusts, there are certain spin-off effects of note. One can consider the effects on students of faculty participation in problems of local and national concern and the opportunities created for student participation in problem-solving approaches.

Equally important is the access provided in such institutes to involve people of interests and skills not normally considered academics in the life of the university. This includes community people, journalists, professional people, etc.

In the last decade one of the critical mission-areas is that of the city. "The problems of the city are multi-faceted, complex and only partially understood. Yet, precisely because they are so diffuse and poorly understood, so difficult to fit neatly into the conceptual and knowledge structures of any of the various scientific disciplines, they must be attacked systematically, on a continuing basis, in multi-disciplinary, coherent research institutions". (National Academy of Sciences). Urban institutes have been the response to this concern and at the present time there are 200 in the United States and five in Canada, of which the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg is one. There is an essential difference, however, between the remaining four institutes and the Institute of Urban Studies which highlights one of the major concerns of this presentation. The Institute of Urban Studies does not function just as a clearing house for research funds for senior faculty to enable them to continue their own research interests, which is the primary position of the other Canadian urban institutes. The Institute of Urban Studies serves as a model for a different type of university body where there is a permanent research staff which operates with a high degree of autonomy and which seeks to involve a wide range of students and faculty from its own and other institutions and from the community at large.

G. Institute of Urban Studies

21 The Institute of Urban Studies was begun in the Spring of 1969, as an applied problem-solving research organization. The Institute has been active in the fields of citizen organization, neighbourhood research and policy. It is responsible to a committee of the Board of Regents which is composed of faculty, students, administration, private individuals and government representatives. The Institute receives funds from private sources, the federal and provincial governments and from the University of Winnipeg in the form of services, office space, etc.

22 In its activities the Institute might be likened to the early system of agricultural land grant colleges, where the university was established to teach, do research and be of service to the community. The Institute of Urban Studies has varied its activities to include these three areas, extending its service, however, beyond the local Winnipeg community.

23 The constituents served by the Institute include community groups, agencies and organizations, the university, and municipal, provincial and federal governments.

24 The Institute is able to utilize the resources of the University community including student and faculty and in this sense it acts as a bridge between academic scholarship and the rest of society. It also finds a distinct advantage in having access to university services.

25 In its fundings, the Institute has pioneered joint federal-provincial funding for an Institute of this type, while using private funds for short-term research projects.

However, despite this development, funding is still a major problem.

The primary requirement of funding is for an operational grant to allow the

26 Institute to hire staff on a full-time basis with a sense of continuity.

Because of the method used by the University Grants Commission to grant funds,

a body such as the Institute does not qualify for support and is not con-

sidered a normal charge on the educational budget. The imperative of

continuous operational funding for urban institutes was also stressed by the report

to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development by the

Committee on Social and Behavioural Urban Research Council. This obviously

requires a redefinition of the role of the university. If it is to be

expected to play a role as an applied research and problem-solver, then it should

be recognized that operational support for such activities be supported. This

means we must move away from a grant-related to the population basis of the

university.

In summary, therefore, the Institute of Urban Studies maintains an

27 essentially outward orientation in its research and involvement, while

maintaining a certain autonomy within the university setting. The price of

that autonomy includes a peripheral status when it comes to being plugged in to

the university decision-making process as to what constitutes an urban university

and a certain year to year uncertainty in its financing.

However, despite the instability of its funding and the tenuous alliances

28 formed with the traditional discipline-oriented departments of the university,

the Institute has begun to demonstrate that the university in concert with its

community and public officials can make its knowledge available to society

for purposeful innovation and social change. It is a model, even with its

imperfections, that has application in other areas of social and economic concern.

H. Recommendations

- 29 a) That the Commission emphasize the important role that universities can play in the field of applied research and suggest ways that the academic community can improve their performance in these kinds of research enterprises.
- 30 b) That the Commission express concern over the increasing tendency towards research tied to the umbilical cord of government. Granting that universities have not lived up to their responsibilities in these areas, it is still vitally important that the kind of independent and critical thought that can best be exercised in a university setting be supported. The interests of Canadians will not be well served if policy ideas and solutions are the sole concern of government research departments, think tanks or directed research programs.
- 31 c) Because of the complex nature of the major problems facing our society funds should be provided to set up mission-oriented research institutes which can provide a multi-disciplinary focus and a sensitive touch with the community.
- 32 d) That such institutes be enabled to operate on long-term operational grants.
- 33 e) That the nature of determining university allocations by the University Grants Commission be changed so that institutes can have a more permanent existence and also be able to better utilize university faculty.
- 34 f) That in order to prevent some of the duplication and overlap that occurs between federal departments and agencies in the granting of funds for urban

research, a special national research council be established to parallel such organizations as the National Research Council, but with a specifically urban focus.

35 g) That such an Urban Research Council should support urban institutes in the same way that agricultural extension colleges were supported under the land grant system. The specific urban focus and the mandate to provide teaching, research and urban problems and community service would ensure that a more appropriate instrumentality for the rationalization of university research, training and service in these fields.

36 h) That initiatives be taken to sponsor more effective dissemination of applied research results by changing structures of learned societies and developing suitable journals.

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